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SUBJECT: CODEL SHAYS MEETS WITH KING ABDULLAH'S CHIEF OF STAFF

Classified By: CDA DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.4 (b and d)

1. (SBU) Summary. CODEL Shays met on October 8 with Marouf Bakheet, Chief of Staff to King Abdullah (and Deputy Director for National Security), to discuss progress in Iraq and other regional issues. Bakheet emphasized the need for greater USG interaction with Iraqi Sunnis to bring them into the political process, and questioned the wisdom of disbanding the Iraqi army (a decision made under the CPA) as well as the breadth of the early, CPA-initiated de-Ba'thification process. Bakheet characterized the 2002 Arab initiative on the Middle East Peace Process as a missed opportunity. End Summary.

2. (U) Congressman Christopher Shays (R-CT), transiting Amman en-route to Iraq, was joined in the meeting by Congressmen Michael McNulty (D-NY), Michael Capuano (D-MA), Ron Kind (D-WI), and delegate Eni Faleomavaega (D-American Samoa), as well as DCM.

IRAQ

3. (C) In response to Rep. Shays' request for an assessment of USG performance in Iraq, Bakheet told the CODEL that the U.S. decisions in 2003 to disband the Iraqi army and broadly dismiss Ba'thist Party members from government jobs were major mistakes. Most Ba'th Party members were such out of professional obligation, according to Bakheet, and were not ideologically aligned to the party. By engaging in widespread de-Ba'thification, the U.S. disenfranchised these marginal Ba'th Party members, who otherwise might have become valuable partners in the rebuilding of Iraq. The disbanding of the army was even more damaging given it led to thousands of young men with military training being let loose with no prospect for gainful employment.

4. (C) Bakheet reaffirmed Jordan's commitment to working with the USG on bringing stability to Iraq through careful analysis of its "political map", and to coordinating closely through both diplomatic and intelligence channels. He said that Jordan is engaging all three major communities in Iraq (i.e., Kurds, Sh'ia, and Sunni Arabs), trying to help put all major players on the same path toward a viable future. Jordan is working with the Iraqi Kurds, assisting Kurdish region president Mustafa Barzani on the "Arab world" language in the draft Iraqi constitution. Jordan is also working with Iraqi Shiites, and is attempting to coax Muqtada al-Sadr off of the extremist path and into the political process, he said.

5. (C) Responding to several CODEL members' questions about when the U.S. should leave Iraq, Bakheet cautioned against withdrawing too early. A premature, substantial U.S. withdrawal would harm U.S. interests in the region, anger U.S. friends, damage U.S. prestige, and undercut regional democratization.

6. (C) The U.S. needs to work more on Sunni inclusion, according to Bakheet. Active Sunni Arab participation in the political process is needed to calm the insurgency. The U.S. needs to offset Iranian influence and tamp down the expectations of the Kurds and Shia. Both Jordan and the U.S. need to do more to engage and empower the Sunnis.

7. (C) Bakheet predicted that the constitution will pass the October 15 referendum, but emphasized that meaningful elections are ultimately more important than the constitution. In his estimation, a new Iraqi parliament and government that are representative of the whole of Iraqi society - though not necessarily a pure democracy - are the means by which internal peace will be attained and will pave the "way out" for the U.S. military presence.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

8. (C) Bakheet noted the centrality of the Palestinian question to the Arab-Israeli conflict and to the continuing ability of terrorists to attract new recruits throughout the region. He said that the Arab peace initiative that came out

of the 2002 Beirut Arab League summit was a potential way forward that was not embraced or properly promoted, and that the Arab initiative would likely have been better than the Quartet-led roadmap - even from the Israeli point of view - given its inclusion of broad security guarantees from all Arab states. Bakheet twice stated that whatever happens in the process on the right of return of displaced Palestinians, the Jewish character of Israel needs to be preserved.

19. (U) CODEL Shays did not have the opportunity to clear this message.
HALE